

# Party crashers? How Belgian citizens view democratic innovations within and beyond political parties.

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## Abstract

In most Western democracies, the system of representation is undergoing growing discontent and disaffection. As major links between the polity and the society, political parties directly suffer from these phenomena, not least through electoral volatility and declining membership. Remedies have been put forward to cure the democratic malaise, among which prominently figures the implementation of more inclusive candidate selection methods. Although many studies rely on the assumption that voters favour more open candidate selection methods, their precise opinion regarding who should be in charge is empirically rarely examined. Based on the PartiRep 2014 Voter Survey, this paper explores the opinion of Belgian voters regarding who should be entitled to choose candidates. The effects of three kinds of factors are examined: citizens' satisfaction and views on democracy, citizens' involvement in party activities, and citizens' ideological placement. The results suggest that those citizens who are the most dissatisfied with the current system, promote more participative modes of democracy, and are more left-leaning are more likely to promote selection by ordinary voters. By contrast, citizens who have been involved in party activities are more reluctant to empower non-members. As such, this research allows for a refining of long-standing assertions regarding what citizens want in terms of (intra-party) democracy.

**Keywords:** Candidate Selection, Intra-party democracy, Political Parties

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## Introduction

Both the public debate and the academic literature have for long acknowledged citizens' discontent with and disconnection from politics. Fading levels of political trust, increased citizens' dissatisfaction and decreasing voter turnout constitute oft-cited examples of this trend (Blais et al. 2004; Dalton 2004; Zelle 1995). One way to remedy these issues has been found in the implementation of reforms aiming at increasing citizens' involvement in politics - e.g. more frequent use of direct democracy in general and of referenda in particular, experiments with deliberative democracy, etc. (Scarrow 2001). Some of these 'democratic innovations' have taken place within parties. Indeed, political parties, because they constitute the main connector between citizens and the political system (Sartori 1976), are in the foreground when it comes to echo the demands of citizens regarding the way politics should be conducted or changed. Among these innovations prominently figure more inclusive procedures of candidate selection such as the introduction of 'primaries', which have certainly generated considerable attention.

Obviously, in most western representative systems, political parties are almighty in this regard (Detterbeck 2011). Candidate selection is part of the parties' recruitment function, and represents a key moment in intra-party life. Candidate selection procedures are also clear yardsticks of intraparty power (Schattschneider 1942, p.101) and intraparty *democratization* (LeDuc 2001; Hopkin 2001; Pennings & Hazan 2001). Somehow paradoxically, while they take place in 'democratic' systems, these processes usually exclude ordinary citizens - i.e. those not involved in partisan activities. Yet from a normative perspective, citizens' input in these processes should not be *a priori* dismissed. There is indeed a fierce and ongoing debate as to whether parties should be democratic for a political system to be democratic (Cross & Katz 2013).

This paper hence specifically examines citizens' opinions on *who should be in charge* of selecting candidates. Previous studies have focused on the preferences of party members, candidates and activists or delegates' regarding candidate selection methods (Bukow 2012; Gauja 2012; Sandri 2012; Wauters 2009), but the opinion of voters is rarely examined. Most of these studies rely on the assumption that, rationally, voters should support selection methods that give them more power in the process - that is, inclusive selection methods such as open primaries. According to that assumption, voters would deprive parties of one of their central prerogatives and critical organisational features; hence contributing to 'crash' the parties. But it remains questionable whether this is really the case.

This paper examines Belgian voters' support for several types of selection methods - from very exclusive (leadership selection) to very inclusive (all voters entitled to choose)-, using the PartiRep<sup>3</sup> 2014 Voter Survey dataset. The Belgian case is relevant, given the prevailing *partitocratic* aspect and *pillarized* structure of its democratic system (Deschouwer 2009). Previous studies have established that party leaders in Belgium have a strong hold on the selection processes, even if rank-and-file members can intervene to some extent (van Haute & Pilet 2007; Vandeleene et al. 2013). In addition, "*the history of candidate selection in Belgium is peculiar*" (Fiers & Pilet 2006, p.6): whereas most European parties gradually opened their selection procedure in the 1965-1990 period (Bille 2001), during that period Belgian parties adopted more exclusive methods, and began only in the 1990s to 're'-open their selection procedures (De Winter 1988; Deschouwer 1994; van Haute & Pilet 2007).

This study reveals that Belgian citizens' support for more inclusive selection methods is not uniform, and depends on several factors. While more inclusive selection processes are often seen as *remedies* to the crisis of representative democracy, the paper tests and shows that more inclusive selection methods are more likely to be promoted by citizens who are the most dissatisfied with the current system. Such methods also tend to be promoted by citizens who favour more deliberative and participative modes of democracy. In addition, since changes in candidate selection procedures affect the relationship patterns between political parties, their members and the overall electorate, as well as affect power distribution within the party, the paper identifies two categories of voters: party members and 'simple' voters. The paper shows that party activism somewhat reduces individuals' likelihood to support the inclusion of voters in the selection process. Besides, given that the spread of primaries in European political parties seem to result from 'a contagion from the left' (Astudillo 2012), we investigate whether citizens ideological position is related to preferences regarding selection methods and find some support to that claim.

The paper is structured as follows. First, we present the literature and the main hypotheses. Second, in order to place this study in context, we describe the ways in which parties in Belgium select their candidates. Third, we proceed with a discussion of the methods and data used. Fourth, the paper explores, through bivariate and multivariate analyses, how citizens' satisfaction with democracy, their involvement in party activities and their ideological position affect their

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<sup>3</sup> PartiRep ('Participation & Representation') is a network of excellence consisting of the leading departments of political science in the country. Since 2007, the network has been subsidised by the Federal Science Policy Office and from 2009 it has been responsible for electoral research in Belgium. The participating institutions are VU Brussels (Kris Deschouwer), KU Leuven (Marc Hooghe), University of Antwerp (Stefaan Walgrave), UL Brussels (Pascal Delwit) en UC Louvain (Benoit Rihoux).

preferences on *who should be in charge* of the selection process. We present the main findings, before a few concluding remarks are drawn.

## 1. Theoretical arguments

### 1.1. Opening candidate selection: curing the democratic malaise?

According to the ‘indispensability of parties’ thesis (Lipset 2000), political parties in representative democracies constitute the main intermediate between society and government. In order to “*link people to a government*” (Sartori 1976, p.25), parties perform specific functions, mainly centred on the articulation and aggregation of social interests, among which prominently figures the recruitment function. In most Western countries, where representative democracy is undergoing growing discontent or disaffection, political parties hence directly suffer from these phenomena. In Europe, declining party membership on the one hand and growing abstention and volatility on the other hand (Mair & Van Biezen 2001; Delwit 2011; Van Biezen et al. 2012) threaten respectively the organizational and electoral basis of the parties. Belgium, which has often been cited as a typical example of pillarization and partitocracy, is no exception to these trends (van Haute et al. 2013). Citizens’ criticisms of current procedures encompass the actors and institutions of representative democracy alike.

Different possibilities of change have been put forward with corresponding specific institutional reforms being meant to answer the demands of citizens regarding the conduct of politics. A first possible theoretical direction is ‘deliberation’, whereby democracy is conceived as based on exchanges of views and arguments ruling decision-making (Cohen 1989; Manin 1985). The other option is to increase ‘participation’ (Chambers 2003; Cohen 1989; Elster 1998), that is, active citizenship. Both options rest on the inclusion of an enlarged public, with all those concerned taking place (Jacquet et al. 2015). Citizens’ dissatisfaction with the current system of representative democracy may thus lead them to support these alternatives (Bengtsson & Mattila 2009; Donovan & Karp 2006; Webb 2013) which give power to different kinds of actors, among which themselves.

In practice, although most of the *democratic innovations* associated with these models occur outside the parties’ spheres and “*might weaken the control that established parties and incumbents have over political agendas*” (Bowler et al. 2002), some innovations have developed within political parties. Among them notably figures candidate selection, which has become an important issue in the debate about intra-party democratization in general and parties’ organizational changes in particular (LeDuc 2001; Rahat & Hazan 2007). Candidate selection touches upon a major paradox in

political science: while parties are pivotal to the functioning of democracies and essential components of democratic systems, it is not entirely clear whether parties themselves, in their own internal functioning, need to be democratic. What is clear from our point of view is that intra-party democratization reforms also rest on the idea of increasing the ‘participation’ dimension of democracy. We therefore expect that citizens who favour participatory and deliberative modes of democracy would also favour more open candidate selection methods as a by-product of these modes.

*H.1a* Citizens who favour participatory and deliberative modes of democracy are more likely to favour selection processes involving all voters.

According to the literature, the media and politicians pushing for reforms, opening up the selection process within parties not only aims to increase citizens’ participation and interest in politics (Put et al. 2014), but also aims to increase citizens’ satisfaction with democracy. Some scholars have demonstrated that citizens dissatisfied by the current representative system are more supportive of having more opportunities to participate (Bowler et al. 2007). In line with this argument, one could expect that it is particularly those citizens who are dissatisfied with the functioning of democracy who are in favour of more inclusive procedures. The paper investigates whether citizens that are the most dissatisfied with the way democracy works tend to support methods that increase voters’ power at the expense of party elites. In other words, we test whether dissatisfied citizens can be described as ‘party crashers’.

*H.1b* Citizens who are the most dissatisfied with the way democracy works are more likely to favour selection processes involving all voters.

### *1.2. Opening candidate selection: empowering voters versus party members*

Candidate selection is part of the parties’ recruitment function, and represents a key moment in intra-party life. This process may involve and combine different layers of party actors (Hazan & Rahat 2010): party leaders, delegates or members. Instruments toward increased participation profoundly affect the relationship between political parties, their members and the overall electorate (Hopkin 2001; Rahat & Hazan 2007). Besides, following the assumption that candidate selection is one if not the main focus of power contest within parties (Schattschneider 1942; Seligman 1961), allowing a more or less inclusive selectorate to intervene in the process impacts on power distribution within the party, more precisely between the different ‘layers’ of party members.

Candidate selection is seen as the exclusive preserve of parties; the decision to opt for one or the other methods is in their hands. Party strategies in changing candidate selection methods are usually associated with their traditional office and vote-seeking goals: attract voters and attract supporters through a polished image and renewed legitimacy (Sandri & Seddone 2012). Most studies have implicitly assumed that changes towards more inclusiveness would be supported by party members and voters, but few have investigated the extent to which these two categories - members and voters - favour one or the other method. However, it does seem plausible that the degree of involvement in party activities affects views on candidate selection.

Different party models reflect different conceptions of democracy and accordingly develop different organisational set-ups, involving and combining different layers of party actors (Hazan & Rahat 2010). Elite-based parties tended to concentrate power in the hands of the central party elites or parliamentary caucus. Mass parties have developed on the basis of a strong grassroots membership, and have often functioned through power delegation to middle-rank activists. The catch-all model (Kirchheimer 1966) has been rather directed at the overall electorate. More recently, the 'cartel party' (Katz & Mair 1995) has experienced a double trend: on the one hand, it tended to centralize candidate selection procedures from the local branches to the national party bodies; on the other hand, candidate selection has become more inclusive, as more people, and notably the rank-and-files members (closed primaries) but also the voters (open primaries), have been granted a say in the processes. By giving power to an enlarged selectorate, party elites attempt to regain control over the party structures by short-cutting the middle-rank activists and delegates (Katz 2001) - who are usually believed to be quite ideologically extreme as compared to the overall electorate, making up a 'curvilinear disparity' (May 1973). More inclusive procedures therefore serve to regain the electorate and to adopt more moderate party positions.

We argue that empowering grassroots members at the expense of party delegates and party leadership may be used as a strategy to retain party members; that is, as a strategy to avoid 'exit' behaviours by giving a greater 'voice' function to the grassroots - even the less active of them. Keeping in mind that selection is a major power resource, members as rational actors may prefer selection to remain in their hands. Therefore, candidate selection by party members (closed-primaries, which require selectors to be affiliated with the party, and in some case, with a certain time requirement) should be supported by voters who are already involved in party activities. By contrast, empowering all voters should not be welcome by party members, as it would shortcut their prerogatives.

*H.2a* Party members are more likely to favour candidate selection processes that are controlled by the party members.

On the contrary, methods such as ‘open primaries’ that allow voters to participate in candidate selection process without being officially affiliated to the party are often considered as tools to increase voters’ interest and attention towards party candidates, and to attract ordinary voters into the party sphere. These methods should therefore be supported by voters, who are willing to participate more punctually and intermittently (Dalton 2002; Dalton 1984). Voters who have never been members may feel quite at odd with party structures and favour extra-party options, leading us to the following hypothesis:

*H.2b* Voters are more likely to favour selection processes involving all voters.

### *1.3. Opening candidate selection: ideological determinants*

Apart from being associated with intra-party power relations selection methods are also related with the *ideological* orientation of parties. If candidate selection may be used instrumentally, value-laden motivations are also part of the explanation of why and how parties would implement such democratic innovations (Bowler et al. 2002), and by extension, of why citizens would support more or less open selection procedures.

Historically, processes of intraparty democratization in Western political parties date back to the 1960s-1970s (Cross & Blais 2012; Scarrow 1999). Changes towards more democratized intraparty procedures are often associated with the rise of ‘new politics’ (Poguntke 1987) and of the new social movements (Kriesi 1999) that emerged at that time as a result of the ‘postmaterialist’ revolution (Inglehart 1977). The rise of postmaterialism, which emphasizes values such as the quality of life and self-expression, “has had as a consequence that participation and involvement have become important issues” (Wauters 2009: 2). Deeply rooted in these movements, new parties emerged that embodied these values and promoted these issues: the Green parties. These parties brought several innovations at the organizational level, notably by implementing more participatory procedures in their internal functioning (Scarrow 1999). This can be seen in the case of the two Belgian Green parties which “opted for a system based upon sovereignty of party members to draw up electoral lists” (Fiers & Pilet 2006: 8).

These new parties rapidly entered the electoral arena and challenged the established parties (Delwit & Close 2015; Ignazi 1996). Green parties’ values and organizational principles have percolated in other parties’ program, but not to the same extent in all parties (or countries). The

‘contagion’ (Barnea & Rahat 2007, p.385) had been at play especially in parties that were directly challenged by these newcomers: parties on the left-side of the spectrum. Examining the reforms Western political parties have implemented internally since the 1960s, scholars have indeed observed that left parties - especially, Social democratic ones - have tendentially been more prone to open their intraparty candidate selection mechanisms than right parties (Astudillo 2012; Barberà & Rodríguez Teruel 2012: 2). In line with this, Nunez and Close (2014) recently found that MPs in left-wing parties tend to be slightly more supportive of the implementation of primaries than right-wing parties’ MPs.

The ideological position hence seems to matter in explaining why some parties are more prone to democratize their selection procedures than others. Accordingly, we assume that, also at the individual level, citizens’ opinion regarding candidate selection procedures depends, at least partly, on their ideological position and more specifically we expect left leaning citizens to be more supportive of more inclusive procedures.

*H.3* Citizens that position themselves on the left side of the political spectrum are more likely to support more inclusive selection methods (by party members or by all voters).

## **2. Candidate selection in Belgium**

A prerequisite to the study of selection processes is undoubtedly to present relevant features of the Belgian electoral system. Given the federal nature of the state, elections occur at several levels (namely at the local, provincial, regional, federal, as well as European levels). For the federal legislative elections (Chamber of Representatives), the country is divided in 11 electoral constituencies (the 10 historical provinces, plus Brussels), in which parties present different lists. District magnitude varies according to the number of inhabitants in the constituency, from 4 to 24. The actual system is described as a flexible-list proportional system, in which voters have the choice to vote for the list - and therefore accept the order of the party list -, or can express preference votes for as many candidates as they wish within the same list, so as to modify the order in which seats are allocated across candidates of the same party. In this system, the list composition is still viewed as decisive in determining who will be elected in the parliament while the effect of preference voting remains marginal (Wauters & Weekers 2008).

As stated by De Winter et al., “*Belgium has one of the most fragmented party systems of any modern democracy*”(De Winter et al. 2006: 933). The system was first structured around traditional cleavages (socio-economic and religious), then completely split around the linguistic/regionalist



divide (French- *vs.* Flemish-speaking). Successive elections of these last decades have revealed the extent to which Belgium has become one country with two regional autonomous party systems (Billiet et al. 2006; Brack & Pilet 2010; De Winter et al. 2006). The current political landscape includes three historical or traditional families, divided along the linguistic border: the Christian democrats (CD&V and CDH), the Socialists (SP.a and PS) and the Liberals (Open VLD and MR). The political spectrum has been extended with the emergence of parties that have structured around ‘new values’ (Ignazi 2003; Inglehart 1977): on one side, the Green family (Groen and Ecolo); on the other side, extreme-right parties (Vlaams Belang and FN). There are also several regionalist parties, with quite different electoral fortunes: since the 2014 elections, the NVA (Flemish regionalists) has become the first party in terms of votes and seats at all upper levels (regional, federal and European); while the FDF (*Francophone Democratic Federalists*) is part of the governing coalition in Brussels, but remains relatively weak in the Walloon region. Finally, during the 2014 election, the radical left (PTB and PvdA+) has made a remarkable breakthrough, especially in Wallonia.

Candidate selection is certainly a very opaque and complex process in Belgium as elsewhere (Gallagher & Marsh 1988). Formal rules exist in the party statutes, but real practices usually diverge from these rules. The complexity of the process partly comes from the multiplicity of actors - or selectorates - involved and levels at which selection occurs. Besides, most of the time, *“the selection does not occur at only one single moment by one single selectorate”* (Vandeleene et al. 2013: 6). Given the complexity of these processes, we might expect that most voters are unaware of the way candidates are selected in their own country, be it in Belgium or elsewhere. It could then be argued that analysing Belgian voters’ opinion on who should be in charge of the candidate selection does not require knowing how Belgian parties select their candidates. Nevertheless, we think that having a more precise idea of how candidates are selected is crucial to place this study in context and allows comparing citizens’ views with actual processes.

**Table 1. Typology of candidate selection methods in Belgian parties (based on Vandeleene 2014)**

	<div style="display: flex; justify-content: space-between; align-items: center;"> <span>Exclusive</span> <span>←</span> <span>→</span> <span>Inclusive</span> </div>			
	Leaders	Delegates	Members	Voters
N-VA, VB, FDF, sp.a, MR				
CdH				
Ecolo, Groen, PS, CD&V				

VLD				
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Fiers and Pilet (2006) talk about a form of ‘guided democracy’: in general, Belgian parties allow for the involvement of grass-root members, but additional rules ensure that the party leadership - at the national and/or constituency levels - controls the drafting of electoral lists. Vandeleene (2014) provides a more detailed typology of candidate selection<sup>4</sup> across the main Belgian parties (see Table 1).

Obviously, ordinary voters are totally absent from candidate selection processes in Belgium, while party members can participate to some extent in several parties. Besides, the partitocratic and pillarized nature of the Belgian political system is reflected in the fact that leaders remain the main decision makers in composing the list: even if members can directly intervene in the process, they rarely reject or modify the model list (Vandeleene et al. 2013; Wauters 2009: 21).

### 3. Data, Method and Measurement

To test the three hypotheses we make use of data from the first wave of the PartiRep Election Study 2014, which provides us with a representative sample of Flemish and Walloon voters. The interviews of this first wave of the survey were conducted face-to-face in the two month-period before the regional, federal and European election, which took place on the same day, the 25<sup>th</sup> of May 2014. The dataset provides information on 2,019 respondents. In order to insure representativeness we apply demographic weights in the analysis that adjust the sample for gender, age, level of education and region. In order to insure representativeness we apply demographic weights in the analysis that adjust the sample for gender, age, level of education and region.

#### 3.1. Measuring the dependent variable

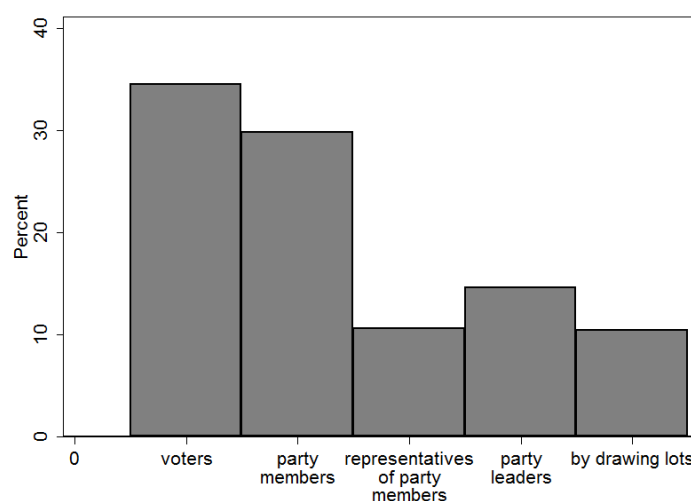
For the measurement of preferences for candidate selection procedures we rely on the answers to the question: *Before the elections, candidate lists for each party have to be drafted. In your opinion, who should determine who should be on the list?* The possible answer categories were 1) voters, 2) party members, 3) representatives of party members, 4) party leaders on provincial level, 5) party leaders on the national level and 6) by means of a lottery among the interested. As we do not have different expectations for people who prefer option 4) and option 5) we recoded these categories in one

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<sup>4</sup> The analysis is based on candidate selection for to the Chamber of Representatives.

broad category which captures respondents who prefer party leaders to select candidates. ‘Drawing lots’ however seems rather difficult to interpret in terms of inclusivity of the selectorate: it does not increase the size of the selectorate and does not really extend the participation dimension of the selection process. The drawing lots category is therefore left out of further analyses. The 32 respondents who did not answer this question were also not included in the analysis. Interestingly, we see that more than a third of voters consider that they should be entitled to choose who is going to stand on the list; and another third thinks that party members should be the main selectorate. Inclusive procedures are thus favoured by voters, as assumed by the literature, yet there is not a very strong support for empowering *extra*-party actors: indeed, we observe that more than 50% of the voters favour methods that empower *intra*-party actors (members, representatives of members, or leadership).

**Figure 1. Preferences on candidate selection procedures**



*Note:* Distribution of answers to question 33: Before the elections, candidate lists for each party have to be drafted. In your opinion, who should determine who should be on the list?

### *3.2. Independent variables: satisfaction with and views on democracy, party membership and ideological placement*

The first hypothesis claims that citizens favouring alternative modes of democracy (*H1a*) and those who are dissatisfied with the way democracy works (*H1b*) are more inclined to support more inclusive candidate selection procedures which involve all voters. Citizens’ attitudes toward the different modes of democracy are based on respondents’ answers to the Likert scale question: ‘There exists different ways of decision-making in politics. Can you indicate to what extent you agree or disagree with the following statements?’ (1 ‘Totally disagree’, 2 ‘Disagree’, 3 ‘Neither agree nor disagree’, 4 ‘Agree’, 5

*Totally agree*'). Four statements are proposed, each related to a specific mode of democracy: participative<sup>5</sup>, deliberative<sup>6</sup>, technocratic<sup>7</sup> and representative<sup>8</sup>. We conducted an exploratory factor analysis that revealed that two items (participative and deliberative, Cronbach's alpha= 0.667) highly load on one factor, and that the two other items (technocratic and representative, Cronbach's alpha=0.269) highly load on a second factor. We use the first factor as a measure of citizens' support for both participatory and deliberative modes of democracy. However, given the low consistency of the scale for the second factor, we kept 'representative' and 'technocratic' as two separate items, and we'll only use 'representative' in the models in order to contrast with more participatory forms of democracy.

Citizens' degree of dissatisfaction with democracy is measured based on the answers to the question whether they are in general 1) very satisfied, 2) fairly satisfied, 3) not very satisfied or 4) not at all satisfied with the way democracy works in Belgium. We mirrored the scale so that higher values indicate more satisfaction.

As a third variable of interest we aim to measure party membership. In the survey, respondents were asked whether they are member of a political party or whether they had been a party member before and how actively they were involved. We recoded the answer categories in such a way that it distinguishes between 1) party members, 2) former party members and 3) respondents that are not and have never been a member of a political party. This third category is clearly the largest capturing about 86.5 percent of the respondents, whereas 6.7 percent of the respondents are current members and 6.8 percent are former party members.

Finally, the third hypothesis claims that left voters are more likely to favour more inclusive candidate selection procedures (i.e. procedures that empower all voters) and accordingly we need to measure the respondents' ideological position. To do so, we rely on respondents' self-placement on an 11-point left-right scale.

### *3.3. Control Variables*

We control for variables that might affect the preferences for candidate selection. First of all, we control for sex, as women - despite contradictory evidence - might be favoured by specific selectorates (Murray et al. 2009; Verge & Troupe 2011; Wauters et al. 2010) and hence would prefer these actors in return. Second, we control for age, since younger voters are more

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<sup>5</sup> *'The Government should ask much more often the opinion of the population'.*

<sup>6</sup> *'Politicians should make their decision more often on the basis of debates among citizens'.*

<sup>7</sup> *'We should let experts take important decisions'.*

<sup>8</sup> *'As elected politicians are held responsible, they have to take decisions by themselves'.*

supportive of direct democracy in general (Donovan & Karp 2006). Third, we control for respondents' level of education. We assume that higher educated citizens are more prone to develop a critical thinking of the system, that they are more familiarized with alternatives to this system, and hence that they are more supportive of inclusive procedures (Budge 1996; Norris 1999). This variable is recoded into three broad categories, capturing respondents with 1) no formal or primary education, 2) secondary education and 3) tertiary education. As most people have accomplished secondary education, we use this category as reference category in the analysis.

Fourth, we control for citizens' interest in politics which is coded on an 11-points scale ranging from 0 ("not at all interested") to 10 ("very much interested"). Based on previous studies (Donovan & Karp 2006), we expect that politically interested citizens display higher level of support for inclusive candidate selection methods. Also coded on an 11-points scale is citizens' trust in political parties (ranging from 0 "no trust at all" to 10 "full trust"). We control for this variable as we expect that citizens who distrust political parties would favour more inclusive procedures - in which parties play a less decisive role.

In a similar vein, we control for the respondent's sense of political efficacy. We assume that respondents characterized by high levels of efficacy will favour the status quo, while citizens with low levels of political efficacy might favour change - in this case, change towards extra-party selection processes (i.e. selection by voters). We distinguish here between internal and external political efficacy. The PartiRep Election Study 2014 provides a battery of statements<sup>9</sup> that allows measuring these two types of political efficacy. We conducted an exploratory factor analysis that revealed that four items (items 1, 2, 4 and 7) highly load on one factor (Cronbach's alpha= 0.674). These factor loadings are used as measurement of citizens' sense of internal efficacy (i.e. their beliefs about their competence to understand, and hence to participate in politics). The other three items load on a second factor. However, these factor loadings are rather weak (no factor loading being higher than 0.44) and the consistency of the scale is also comparatively lower (Cronbach's alpha= 0.585). Therefore and because it seems theoretically closest to the latent

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<sup>9</sup> The question wording and the statements read as follows: *'To what extent you agree with each of the following statements?'*

1: *I think I am able to participate in politics.*

2: *I think that I could do as good a job as most of the politicians that we elect.*

3: *In the elections, one party promises more than the other but in the end, nothing much happens.*

4: *I think that I am better informed about politics and government than most people.*

5: *An ordinary citizen does have sound influence on political events and on what the government does.*

6: *Voting does not make sense, as parties do anyhow what they want.*

7: *I think that I have a pretty good understanding of the important problems facing our country.*

concept of external efficacy (i.e. citizens' beliefs about their influence on political events and governmental action), we only use the fifth item as measurement for citizen's external efficacy.

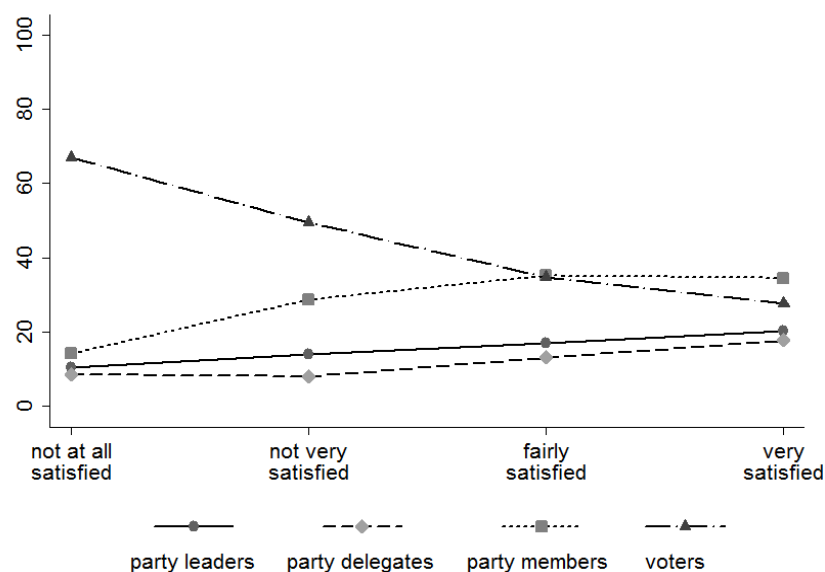
Additionally, in order to ensure that it is really party membership which affects the preferences for candidate selection procedures and not identification with a specific political party, we control for whether or not a respondent feels close to one particular party. Finally, we add a dummy variable indicating whether the respondent is living in Flanders or in Wallonia, as previous studies have shown that political behaviours on both sides of the linguistic borders are increasingly diverging (Deschouwer et al. 2010; Frognier et al. 2012; Pilet et al. 2014).

## 4. Results

### 4.1. Bivariate Analyses

The focus is on the relationship between the three variables of interest and the different preferences for selection procedures. Figure 2 shows that the more citizens are satisfied with the way democracy works in Belgium the less they are inclined to support selection procedures in which voters determine who gets a place on the candidate list. Among the most satisfied respondents, on the other hand, the most favoured procedure is the one in which party members are “in charge”. In other words, those who are satisfied with the current system of representation favour a method that is actually applied - as we have seen, to a certain extent - in most Belgian parties. This finding already seems to support the first hypothesis, with dissatisfied citizens being in favour of more inclusive selection processes.

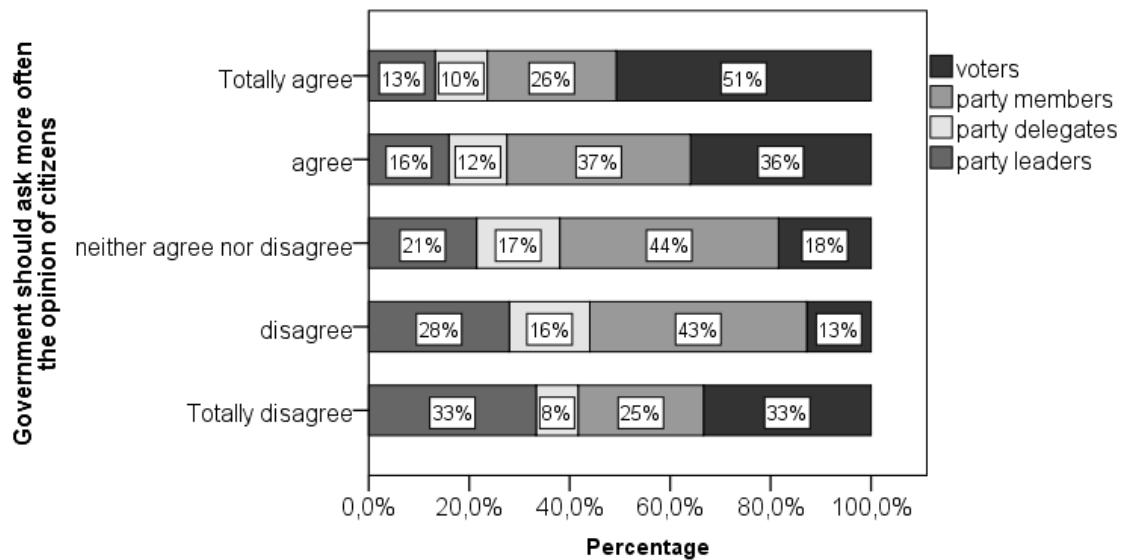
**Figure 2. Preferences on candidate selection procedures and satisfaction with democracy**



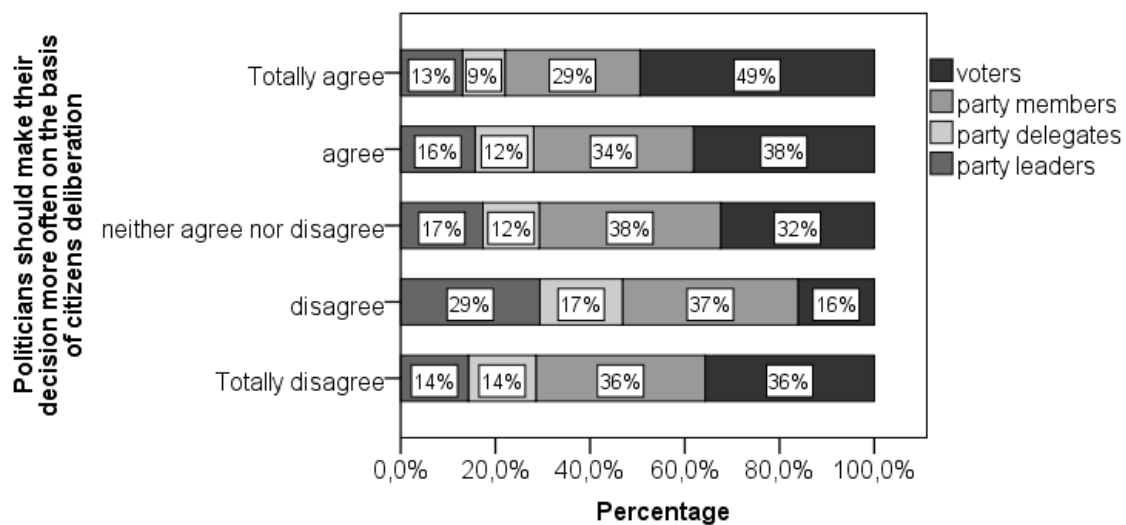
*Note:* Average preferences on selection procedures in shares, by satisfaction with democracy.

Figures 3, 4 and 5 indicate how different modes of democracy (participative, deliberative and representative) may be correlated with opinions on who should be in charge of selecting candidates. Citizens who support participative and deliberative modes of democracy seem to favour selection methods by ordinary voters, whereas citizens who agree with the principle of representative democracy tend to be more supportive of exclusive selection methods (leaders and delegates).

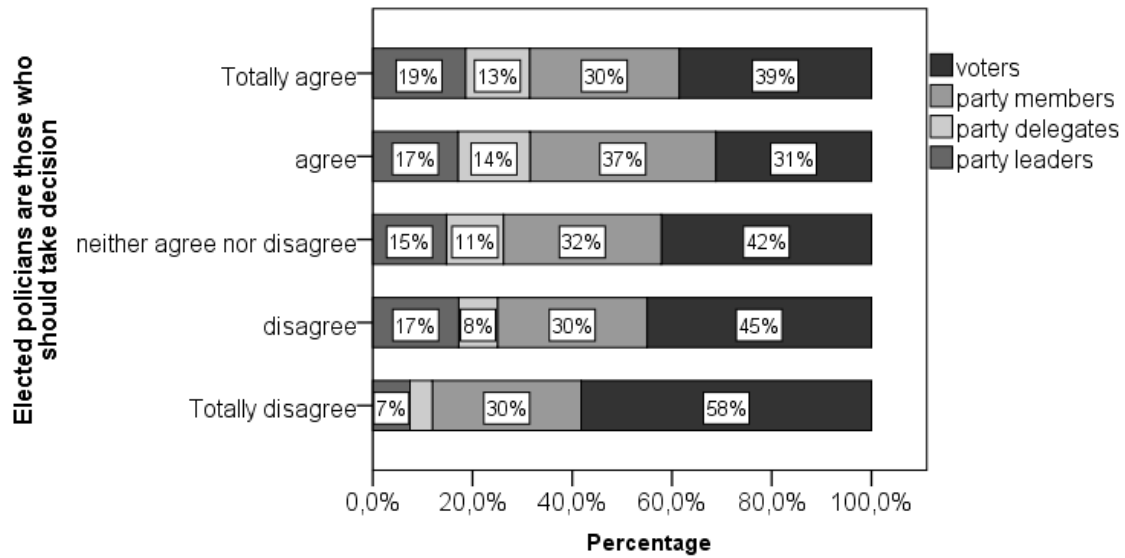
**Figure 3. Preferences on candidate selection and participative democracy**



**Figure 4. Preferences on candidate selection and deliberative democracy**

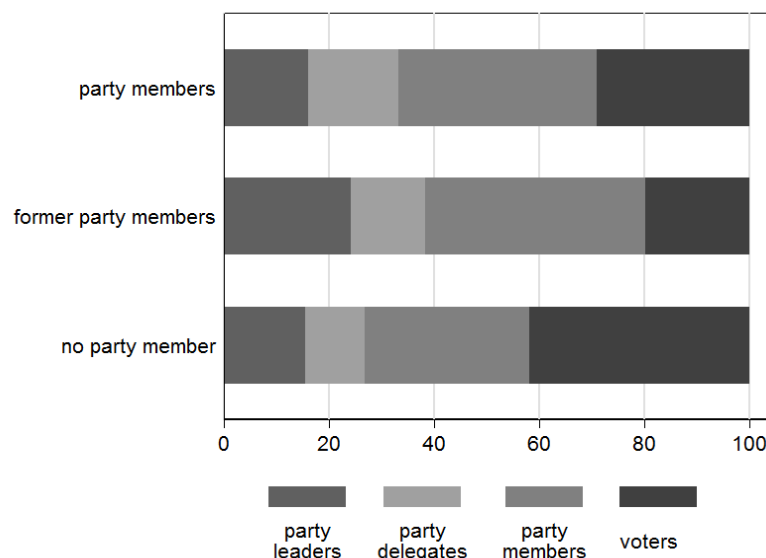


**Figure 5. Preferences on candidate selection and representative democracy**



When looking at party membership (Figure 6), we find that those who are or who have been a member of a political party seem to have rather similar preferences. In comparison to those who are not (and have never been) involved in a political party, the current and former party members clearly favour selection procedures that remain within the scope of action of political parties - i.e. leaving party leaders, party delegates or the party members themselves in charge. Unsurprisingly, non-members seem to prefer selection procedures in which voters decide on who gets a place on the list. In comparison to actual party members, former party members are more in favour of party leaders and party members to select candidates, and less in favour of party voters.

**Figure 6. Preferences on candidate selection procedures and party membership**

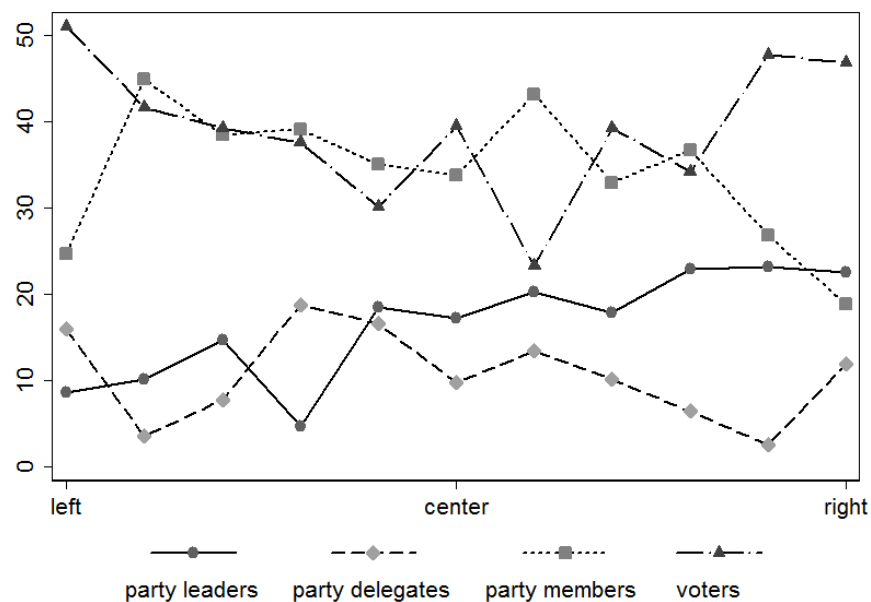




*Note:* Average preferences on selection procedures in percent, by degree of party activism.

Regarding left-right self-placement (Figure 7), we claim that citizens who locate themselves on the left side of the ideological spectrum prefer more inclusive selection procedures. However it appears that extreme positioning is associated with preferring the intervention of all voters, while more centrist positioning shows a greater variety of views on who should be in charge of selection<sup>10</sup>. Altogether, it shows that having voters or party members decide represent the most popular selection procedures across the entire spectrum except for the two most extreme positions, which clearly favour selection by voters. Also, the involvement of party leaders is more favoured by voters situated on the right on the political spectrum, while representatives of party-members by those of the centre-left.

**Figure 7. Preferences on candidate selection procedures and self-positioning on the left-right scale**



*Note:* Average preferences on selection procedures in share, by placement on the left-right scale.

#### 4.2. Multivariate Analysis

Having examined the relationship between our independent variables and preferences of candidate selection, we now proceed with the presentation of the results of the multivariate analysis. Given that the dependent variable is nominal and the answer categories are unordered,

<sup>10</sup> Interestingly, this echoes previous studies which have investigated party elites' support for inclusive methods, and which have shown that extreme positions tend to be correlated with support for more inclusive methods (Nunez & Close 2014; Serra 2011).

we conducted a multinomial logit model. There are 6 possible combinations of selection choices that can be compared to each other (see Table 2).

Regarding the effect of control variables, several elements can be pointed out. Age seems correlated with supporting selection by delegates over selection by voters or members. Being a woman is rather associated with support for more inclusive methods, but the relationship does not reach the 0.05 significance level. Tertiary education decreases the likelihood to favour selection by voters over selection by members or delegates: more educated citizens tend to favour the status quo, contrary to what we expected. Being Walloon diminishes the probability to prefer a selection by leaders instead of a selection by party members. A low level of internal political efficacy is associated with support for a selection by the leadership instead of delegates. In other words, citizens who do not feel competent to participate in politics will favour a selection in which leaders decide. A high level of political interest appears to positively influence the likelihood to favour selection by members over all other categories, not selection by voters. Finally, trust in political parties is positively correlated with favouring selection by leaders over members or delegates, and negatively correlated with favouring selection by voters over members or delegates, as expected.

**Table 2. Multinomial Logit Model of Preferences on Candidate Selection Procedures**

	ln[voters/ members]	ln[delegates/members ]	ln[leaders/ members]	ln[voters/delegates]	ln[leaders/ delegates]	ln[voters/ leaders]
Constant	3.055*** (.492)	-2.212*** (.688)	-.596 (.675)	5.266*** (.698)	1.615* (.846)	3.651*** (.691)
Age	-.003 (.004)	<b>.014*</b> (.006)	.007 (.005)	<b>-.017**</b> (.006)	-.006 (.006)	<b>-.010*</b> (.005)
Female	.157 (.136)	-.071 (.181)	<b>-.306#</b> (.168)	.228 (.184)	-.235 (.208)	<b>.463**</b> (.171)
Education (ref. Secondary)						
Primary	.273 (.278)	-.075 (.368)	.265 (.311)	.347 (.352)	.339 (.385)	.008 (.293)
Tertiary	<b>-.319*</b> (.137)	.152 (.181)	.023 (.171)	<b>-.471*</b> (.186)	-.129 (.210)	<b>-.342*</b> (.177)
Region (ref. Flandres)	-.093 (.137)	-.130 (.190)	<b>-.408*</b> (.166)	.037 (.194)	-.278 (.215)	<b>.314#</b> (.169)
Political interest	<b>-.119***</b> (.031)	<b>-.144***</b> (.041)	<b>-.076*</b> (.039)	.026 (.040)	.068 (.046)	-.043 (.039)
Internal efficacy	-.005 (.078)	.109 (.120)	-.164 (.101)	-.115 (.126)	<b>-.273*</b> (.141)	.159 (.108)
External efficacy	-.046 (.065)	.077 (.080)	-.070 (.075)	-.123 (.084)	-.147 (.093)	.024 (.077)
Trust in political parties	<b>-.107**</b> (.041)	.033 (.056)	<b>.178***</b> (.051)	<b>-.140*</b> (.056)	<b>.146*</b> (.064)	<b>-.285***</b> (.051)
Satisfaction with democracy	<b>-.426***</b> (.105)	.141 (.170)	-.191 (.138)	<b>-.568***</b> (.174)	<b>-.333#</b> (.195)	<b>-.235#</b> (.138)
Participatory & Deliberative democracy	<b>.406***</b> (.077)	.006 (.086)	-.043 (.082)	<b>.400***</b> (.095)	-.049 (.108)	<b>.449***</b> (.091)
Representative democracy	-.100 (.063)	<b>.190*</b> (.091)	-.039 (.084)	<b>-.290**</b> (.093)	<b>-.229*</b> (.108)	-.061 (.086)
Party identification	.106 (.143)	-.042 (.187)	.170 (.174)	.149 (.195)	.212 (.214)	-.064 (.179)
Party membership (ref. no member)						
Former member	<b>-.824**</b> (.285)	-.118 (.300)	.201 (.274)	<b>-.706*</b> (.355)	.319 (.354)	<b>-1.025**</b> (.332)
Current member	-.236 (.276)	.261 (.296)	-.226 (.305)	-.497 (.326)	-.488 (.350)	-.010 (.332)
Left-right self-placement (0=left, 10=right)	-.005 (.030)	.001 (.042)	<b>.088*</b> (.040)	-.006 (.043)	<b>.087#</b> (.050)	<b>-.093*</b> (.042)
Correctly predicted: 47.4% Pseudo R <sup>2</sup> = 0.0782, Wald chi <sup>2</sup> (48)=271.78, Prob>chi <sup>2</sup> = 0.000 <i>Sign.</i> : # $p < 0.1$ * $p < 0.05$ , ** $p < 0.01$ , *** $p < 0.001$ .						
N=1692						

Looking at attitudes toward democracy, we find that citizens who favour participatory and deliberative modes of democracy significantly favour selection methods by voters over all the other categories of actors, as expected in H1a. Besides, support for a representative mode of democracy is associated with favouring selection by party delegates over members, voters or leaders. Likewise, concerning satisfaction with democracy, we find that the more satisfied citizens are, the less likely they are to favour voters over party members, or over representatives of party members. This is overall consistent with H1b. Satisfied voters are less supportive of the implementation of open primaries in Belgium. They seem rather in favour of the *status quo*; in other words, they seem satisfied with the way democracy works beyond and within parties. To the contrary, dissatisfied voters are willing to change the *status quo* by giving ordinary citizens a greater say in the selection processes. However, we can notice that low satisfaction is also related with favouring party leaders over party representatives, as if dissatisfaction would also result in favouring more ‘authoritarian’ forms of decision-making.

Looking at the effects of party membership, taking ‘ordinary voters’ as a reference, we find that it is mostly former and not current members who are significantly less in favour of selection by voters over all the other categories. There is limited support for hypotheses 2a and 2b when comparing current members to non-members. Indeed, if we control for their political interest, trust in parties, sense of efficacy<sup>11</sup>, etc. ordinary voters and party members do not seem to differ that much. In other words, there is not such a clear divide whereby members would prefer all internal party selection processes compared to non-members who would favour only extra-party processes. The picture is more nuanced and further research is needed in order to better understand the preferences and motivations of these actors.

If we compare former party members with ordinary voters, we find that former party members are significantly more sceptical towards voters deciding on selection compared to the option of having party members or party delegates in charge of candidate selection. So indeed, as hypothesis 2a claims, former party members still seem to prefer candidate selection procedures that remain in the hands of members, or at least that leave the party “in charge”. This is also interesting in view of the literature on party membership dropouts as it shows that exit behaviours do not necessarily entail rejection of the party structures, to the contrary.

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<sup>11</sup> ANOVA tests in SPSS show that current members are significantly more interested in politics than former members, which are also more interested in politics than non-members. Current members have also a significant higher level of trust in parties than former and non-members. Regarding levels of internal and external political efficacy, non-members have significant lower levels of political efficacy than both current and former members.

Finally we consider the effect of the ideological positioning. Here we find that right-leaning voters tend to favour leaders over members and, although somewhat less significantly, leaders over representatives. This only partly confirms H3, which claims that citizens positioning themselves on the left side of the ideological spectrum seem to be more supportive of more inclusive procedures<sup>12</sup>.

## Conclusion

Candidate selection is a crucial moment in any democratic system. Although in both the public debate and the academic literature more light is still being shed on election than selection, the latter can sometimes prove more decisive than the former. A number of elections have rather predictable results (a case in point is ‘safe seats’ constituencies) which almost amount to the party directly choosing who will hold the position. More generally, in the context of the personalisation of politics, choosing a specific candidate (e.g. choosing a ‘name’ to represent the party) often tilts the balance in favour of one party over the other.

Political parties have for long understood the key interest that candidate selection represents and have acted as gatekeepers to these processes. And accordingly, most studies have until now considered candidate selection as an intra-party process - a ‘secret garden’ (Gallagher & Marsh 1988). As such, although they take place in democratic systems, processes of candidate selection usually exclude ordinary citizens - i.e. those not involved in partisan activities. Such is certainly the case in Belgium. Yet from a normative perspective, citizens’ input in these processes should not be *a priori* dismissed. In that regard, there is a fierce and ongoing debate as to whether parties should be democratic for a political system to be democratic (Cross & Katz 2013).

Indeed, parties are deemed to eventually open-up or ‘democratize’ candidate selection in order to regain voters and legitimacy. This reasoning however relies on the unproven assumption that citizens want more intra-party democracy, and that this would be detrimental to party organisations, making them ‘party crashers’. This chapter has finally brought this long-standing assumption to a test. Going beyond pessimistic observations of what democracy is and normative considerations about what democracy should be, this chapter has asked what citizens’ want for it. This research has not focused on how selection is happening but on how it should be happening - that is, from the normative standpoint of citizens: who should be *gardening*. The recent triple

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<sup>12</sup> Note that we have also tested the effect of the squared left-right placement, but we did not find any significant result.

election of May 2014 gave the opportunity to investigate this question in Belgium. Given the peculiarities of the Belgian system - pillarized and partitocratic -, further researches in other national contexts could shed additional light on this issue.

The analyses have revealed that, as often assumed, a majority of Belgian voters support inclusive methods (selection by voters or by members). From another perspective, although this pattern needs to be refined, Belgian voters are still largely favouring methods that empower *intra*-party actors over *extra*-party ones. 'Only' one third of our respondents thus consider that voters - themselves - should be included in the process: all voters are not party crashers. The chapter has established how satisfaction with democracy, attitudes toward different democratic models, party activism and left-right positioning of individuals influence their opinion on who should be in charge of candidate selection. Support for deliberative and participatory democracy goes hand in hand with the most inclusive selection processes: the 'open primaries'. Alongside, positive attitude towards representative democracy is translated at the intra-party level by preferences towards a selection led by delegates. Satisfied voters tend to support the *status quo*, or in other words, they tend to admit that intra-party actors - members or delegates - should be entitled to choose who is going to stand on the list. As regard party activism, non-members tend to be more supportive of *extra*-party options, although only with much more limitations than expected. Finally, the research has related citizens' opinion on the matter at hands to political preferences, and has shown that right-leaning citizens tend to be more prone to accept exclusive selection methods.

At a more general level, this chapter has highlighted that a distant relationship with politics and with political institutions such as parties tends to translate into a willingness to democratize one of the main mechanism through which the political elite is reproduced. As public confidence in politics is crucial for the legitimacy of the decision-making process, the question remains as to whether changing democracy *within* parties can truly improve the trust relationship between citizens and their representatives.

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